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The contribution of religious education and ethics to the development of worldviews: reflections of Finnish 9th grade students

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to discuss the role of religious education and ethics instruction in the development of worldviews in public education using empirical data. The research question of the article is: How is the contribution of RE and Ethics in the development of worldviews perceived among 9th grade students? The study is based on qualitative interview data (N = 37) gathered from Finnish 9th grade students of different religious and worldview backgrounds. The article will also describe three cases from that sample: from Islamic RE, Lutheran RE and Ethics instruction. The data was analyzed with qualitative content analysis. The results indicate that students' perceptions on the contribution of RE or ethics to the development of their worldviews could be divided into two groups: RE or Ethics were seen as contributors to students' already existing worldviews or considered insignificant in relation to the development of their worldviews. Whether the instruction was considered strengthening or irrelevant in the development of a worldview did not depend on the background of the student. Aspects related to experiences about the instruction were intertwined with the questions referring to the contribution of instruction in the formation of worldviews.

Keywords Religious educations · Ethics instruction · Worldview education · Worldview

1 Introduction

The purpose of this article is to contribute to the discussion about the role of religious education in the development of public education worldviews using empirical data based on students' perceptions and experiences. In recent years, literature has witnessed an international upsurge in the interest surrounding worldviews in public education (Aerts et al 2007; van der Kooij et al. 2017; Kavonius et al. 2015; Commission on Religious Education 2018).

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For instance, internationally there have been discussions whether worldviews should play a more integral role in religious education in schools (CoRE2018) and whether the concept of a worldview may have the potential to function as an integrative framework with which to investigate the interaction of beliefs, values, and attitudes in individual and communal life (Johnson et al. 2011; Koltko-Rivera 2004). Some of the key issues in the current Finnish academic discussion are questions about how to enhance students' opportunities for fluent inter-worldview dialogue so that no one has to stand out as an advocate or a representative of a certain worldview (e.g. Kimanen 2019; Åhs et al. 2019; Zilliacus 2019); teachers' difficult role in the current model (Ubani 2015; Zilliacus 2019) and how to approach regional variance concerning cultural and religious diversity in worldview education (Holm et al. 2019).

However, the relative absence of the topic in generic educational discourse (but see Noddings 2003; Erricker and Erricker 1996, 2000; Koltko-Rivera 2004) is somewhat problematic as arguably a worldview is a significant implicit component of all educational endeavors. For instance, Miedema (2012, 2014) views worldview education as an essential part of education that aims at personhood formation. He uses concepts such as "meaning-presenting", "meaning-giving", "meaning-making", "meaning-taking" and "meaning-in-action" that illustrate the comprehensive nature of the processes connected with meaning and, in the end, with worldview education (Miedema 2012). Schools can be seen to shape worldviews not only explicitly but via implicit beliefs too as curricular and pedagogical structures acculturate students into ways of behavior and reasoning. In all settings, learning involves a process of enculturation into the discourses of a community (Lave and Wenger 1991) and an increasing socialization into particular norms of behavior and ways of thinking shared in a particular community (Putnam and Borko 2000).

The study presents qualitative interview data from 37 Finnish 9th grade students. They are near to the completion of their nine-year basic education. They offer an interesting insight into the discussion about the education of worldviews in public religious education. Similarly to public education in many Western countries, in Finland Religious Education (RE) and Ethics are considered integral subjects for developing students' worldviews and values (Kallioniemi and Ubani 2012; Ubani and Tirri 2014). In Finland religious education is a compulsory subject. It is given "according to one's own religion" (NCCBE2014): while the content somewhat emphasizes the respective religion, there are no faith-formation or devotional aims (Kallioniemi and Ubani 2012). In practice, instruction is given in the maximum of thirteen different religions, including Lutheran, Catholic, and Islamic religion, and Ethics instruction is given to students without religious affiliation. The recent Finnish national core curricula from both 2004 and 2014 for basic education are quite explicit in their aims concerning issues related to worldviews. Among other things, the curriculum for RE states that the task of instruction is to offer students knowledge, skills and experiences, from which they obtain materials for building an identity and a worldview" (NCCBE2014, p. 202). The task of Ethics instruction is somewhat similar and is designed to "support growth into full, democratic citizenship, which, in a globalizing and swiftly changing society, requires an ability to think and act ethically, broad related skills, and the accumulation of general education, in culture and personal worldview" (p. 214).

2 What is a worldview?

The concept of “worldview” has been conceptualized in several fields and in several ways. In a broad sense, a worldview can be used to refer to an ideology, religion or other belief system of an individual (e.g. Smart 1998, pp. 19–20). The concept of worldview, generally, “represents different ways in which individuals or groups interpret the world and reality. A worldview is structured from ontological and ethical orientations to the world, from humanity and life questions, and it contains beliefs related to the physical and social world as well as to the self. These interpretations and orientations may influence attitudes, action and/or behaviour at the implicit or explicit level” (Kavonius et al. 2015, pp. 320–337). The concept can be interpreted to include both religious and non-religious interpretations and views of the world (see also Droogers 2014; Taves et al 2018).

The origins of the concept lay mainly in Western philosophy and theology. Quite commonly, the concept has been used as a synonym for the German notion of *Weltanschauung* (e.g. Helve 1993, 14; Koltko-Rivera 2004, p. 2; Naugle 2002). But here lies some conceptual contradictions as *Weltanschauung* has explicit connotations that assume that an individual has made a conscious effort to organize reality, whereas a worldview has been perceived as an implicit part of *Weltanschauung* (Helve 1993, pp. 14–15; Helve and Pye 2001–2002, p. 88). In this sense it could be claimed that everyone has a worldview but few have a *Weltanschauung* that they are aware of (Niiniluoto 1984, p. 87).

This study adheres to the views of van der Kooij et al. (2013) who have defined the concept of a worldview in the context of RE. Their definition makes a distinction between “organized” and “personal” worldviews. An *organized* worldview has developed over time and is an established system with certain sources, traditions, ideals, and so forth. It is also related to a particular group of believers who hold on to a similar view of life (van der Kooij et al. 2013, p. 215). In contrast to this, a *personal* worldview is more complicated to analyze because it is important to emphasize both what a personal worldview *means* and what it *implies* when we say that an individual has a personal worldview. As mentioned earlier, an individual can have a worldview without being able to articulate it accurately (ibid. 217–18).

van der Kooij et al. scrutinize the two aspects of worldviews in terms of four elements and explain why these four elements are part of a “worldview”. These elements constitute characteristics for both organized and personal worldviews. The four elements of the two aspects of worldview are (van der Kooij et al. 2013, pp. 214–215; see also Taves et al. 2018):

1. existential questions: in Paul Tillich’s words, matters of “ultimate concern”, which are taken with unconditional seriousness in people’s lives (Tillich 1965, p. 7), such as questions of life and death. van der Kooij et al. state that existential questions express ontological, teleological, cosmological, theological, eschatological and ethical notions.
2. the influence of a worldview on people’s acting and thinking,
3. moral values, and
4. existential questions of meaning-giving in life: the meaning *of* life dealing with an understanding of the purpose of human beings in general, and the meaning *in* life as a personal interpretation of the meaning of life or other aspects in life (e.g. the family) that can give purpose, sense, value and direction to an individual’s life.

In their study, van der Kooij et al. conclude that “an organized worldview is a view on life, the world and humanity that prescribes answers to existential questions. In this way, organized worldviews aim to influence the thinking and acting of people. Organized worldviews contain moral values and aim to provide meaning in people’s lives” (ibid. 217). They conclude that a personal worldview is “a view on life, the world and humanity that can be but are not necessarily moral and out of answers to existential questions. When a person has a personal worldview, these norms, values, ideals and existential notions influence his/her thinking and acting and either give meaning in life or, in the nihilistic case, deny that there is meaning in life” (ibid. 222). A personal worldview is characteristically complex since it is defined individually. Furthermore, complexity defines also the formation of a personal worldview since the process involves numerous contributors and factors, such as organized worldviews, family, school, media, peer group and one’s own personal life experience. A personal worldview is therefore a kind of bricolage (van der Kooij et al. 2013, pp. 213–215; see also Harvieu-Leger 2006).

3 Research procedures

The empirical research question of this article is:

1. How is the contribution of RE and Ethics to the development of a personal worldview perceived among 9th grade students?

The data consists of semi-structured interviews conducted with 37 9th graders in five Helsinki metropolitan area schools. The participants included 22 girls and 15 boys, coming from a variety of family, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The participants were from six instruction groups: Evangelical Lutheran (14), Islam (5), Orthodox (3), Catholic (2), Buddhist (2), Krishna Consciousness (1) and Ethics (10). The interviews were on average 40 min long, and they were conducted in the pupils’ own schools during the school day.

Permission for the research was obtained from the municipalities, the head teachers of the participating schools, and from guardians. All the stakeholders involved were carefully informed of the purpose and process of the research. The participants were recruited by contacting their RE or Ethics teachers to ask for volunteers for the interviews. Ethical matters, such as anonymity and confidentiality, were explained, and the students were informed that they could discontinue the research at any point, even in the middle of an interview, an option no one chose.

Background information included facts about the worldviews and religious backgrounds of their families and themselves, as well as the history of RE and/or Ethics studies they have participated in. In addition to the background information, the semi-structured interviews included themes adopted from the REDco2 questionnaire (Weisse 2009), such as:

- The elements of one’s personal worldview
- Perceptions and experiences on RE or Ethics instruction in school
- Encountering worldviews in RE or Ethics, in school, in general, and in everyday life

The data were transcribed and analyzed by inductive qualitative content analysis (Newby 2010, pp. 483–487, see also Krippendorff 2004).

The findings are reported in two sections. First, we present the participants' views on how the students perceived the role of RE and Ethics in the formation of worldviews and make some remarks on what aspects in instruction contribute to whether the instruction affects their worldviews. Second, we elaborate the participants' views by introducing the cases of three students and their views on the issues mentioned above. Third, we report personal accounts on the role of RE and Ethics in the development of worldviews using three case examples. The case examples include students representing Minority RE, Lutheran RE, and Ethics. In addition, we will illustrate the students' views on the aspects of instructions that affect their worldviews.

4 Results

4.1 What is the contribution of RE and Ethics to the development of worldviews?

In the study the 9th grade students' perceptions on the contribution of RE or Ethics to the development of their worldviews could be divided into two groups. RE or Ethics were either seen as contributors to students' already existing worldviews ($N=25$), or, conversely, that RE or Ethics were considered insignificant in relation to the development of their worldviews ($N=12$). The main contents of these perceptions are presented in Table 1.

Those students who considered the development of their worldviews as being supported by RE or Ethics instruction pointed out quite clearly elements of their personal worldview. In these cases the contents were personally relevant to the students beyond the classroom or in relation to their families and/or religious communities. Some of these elements, such as their views on the supernatural and on the source of ethical and moral standards, were seen as being influenced or taught by a parent or both parents, in some cases also by a religious community or other worldview-related community, and then supported by the chosen instruction at school, either RE or Ethics.

Table 1 The students' perceptions on the contribution of RE or Ethics to the formation of their personal worldviews

Perceptions on the effect of RE and Ethics	Reasoning
1. RE/Ethics strengthen an existing worldview	RE/Ethics supporting elements of an existing worldview in either the positive or the negative sense RE/Ethics supporting the worldview of parents/home RE/Ethics supporting belonging to a religious denomination or community
2. RE/Ethics do not relate or contribute to a worldview	RE/Ethics is just like any other subject in school Not all students have an articulated worldview RE/Ethics does not represent the students' own worldviews (especially in a religious sense)

Whether the instruction was considered strengthening or irrelevant in the development of a worldview did not depend on the background of the student. When the instruction was seen as supportive of a worldview, three groups of students were apparent. Firstly, members of minority religion groups: Catholic Christianity, Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Buddhist and Krishna Consciousness. Secondly, students who have experienced a religious revival or have in other ways recently come to terms with different personal worldview questions. Thirdly, students who described themselves as atheists.

Within these groups, the students expressed two kinds of support for their worldviews: positive and negative. “Positive” support was seen as something that strengthened their existing worldview as such. “Negative” support, on the other was seen as something that made them reject something in the instruction and thus made them think for example of the opposite. Through this process, the development of their own worldview was supported. These “positive” and “negative” effects were mainly perceived as the results of instruction, not as intentional aims or goals of teachers or curricula:

There was this period in my life when I was much younger and my father had this influence on me. He said a lot of bad stuff about (Catholic) religion and I thought I wouldn't want to participate in RE ever again. ... But it would've been awful if I hadn't been in this RE class because now I see how things really are and I'd like everyone to be able to find out how much you get from religion and how good it is ...

Girl, 15, Catholic RE.

“Well, especially now in the 9th grade it (RE) has strengthened my thoughts about leaving the church, but all these ethics and morals have been really good and useful for me and I've learnt a lot.

Girl, 15, Lutheran RE.

The aspects related to experiences about the instruction that the students mentioned were grouped into three topics: *confessionality*, *teachers' worldview* and *contents of instruction*. These experiences were intertwined with the questions referring to the contribution of instruction in the formation of worldviews. In what follows, we present these findings and elaborate their relevance by means of three case examples.

The first aspect that students mentioned as contributing to whether the instruction affected their worldviews was *confessionality*. In this data confessionality referred to educating intentionally into a certain type of worldview. In Lutheran RE this would mean Protestant Christianity, in Ethics secular humanism or humanist philosophy, or in minority RE the religious tradition forming the background of the instruction. The second aspect was called *the teachers' worldview*, referring to how the teacher's own worldview had appeared to the students or how they had interpreted it. The third aspect was *contents of instruction* referring to how the students had experienced instruction in practice. These views form three categories describing different perspectives. The contents of these themes are featured in Table 2.

In all of the subjects, some students described confessional elements, indicating that both RE and Ethics were very much teacher-reliant subjects. Confessional elements included, for example, discussions where the teacher assumed that the students in the classroom were affiliated with a certain religious group, e.g. Islam, or had a specific personal worldview e.g. atheist. In these cases the students also reported teaching that seemed to them to be normative: for instance, certain religious dogmas or rituals might be presented as the only “truth” or the only way of doing things. Confessionality was

Table 2 What aspects of the instruction they received affected students' worldviews?

Aspect of instruction	Main content
1. Confessionality	RE as a continuance of religious activities outside school Ethics as a continuance of non-religious life outside school Not viewed as "ideologically" different from other subjects
2. Teachers' worldview	Teachers with "neutral" attitudes for example towards different worldviews in a classroom setting Teachers with religious/secular/atheist worldviews articulated to the students
3. Contents of instruction	An easy/important/interesting/useless/nice/dull/self-repeating subject Differences in curricula and classroom practices between different RE and Ethics groups Elements of othering: talk of "them" and "us"

most clearly reported with regard to minority RE, especially in Islam RE and in Krishna Consciousness RE. Also, in Ethics instruction, there were some elements of atheism-driven teaching. These remarks overlapped with students' interpretations concerning teachers' personal worldviews. When there were confessional elements in teaching, students more easily described their teachers as, for example, "religious", "conservative" (in their worldview) or "atheist". Furthermore, when students' perceptions on teaching indicated confessionalism or visibility of the teacher's personal worldview, the contents of the instruction were also seen to contain elements of "worship" or a religious/atheist agenda:

They have been very religious (Islamic RE teachers) ... they always want me to learn that Arabic stuff and like now this teacher has been putting pressure on me so that I would start going to the mosque. But my parents, they don't want me to.

Girl, 15, Islamic RE.

They are only human (RE teachers), you know, but if an RE teacher is very religious, like ours is, then they need to be able to express religiousness in a non-aggressive way. Otherwise, people start to react, like if you try to convert them to something, those who are not religious are like "ewww, go away."

Girl, 15, Lutheran RE.

Our teacher has studied in the Islamic University of Medina, I think, that's why he knows so much ... I wouldn't trust a teacher if they weren't a Muslim.

Boy, 15, Islamic RE.

Some teachers were perceived to be "neutral" in their teaching. This perception was the case both when students were and were not able to define their teacher's personal worldview. When teaching was considered as "neutral", students reported less talk of "the other" in their RE or ethics class:

I haven't noticed anything (concerning the worldview of an Ethics teacher). ... It might influence somebody if someone thought that they should think like the teacher teaches since they are the authority.

Girl, 16, Ethics.

He (Catholic RE teacher) is a priest. ... He doesn't (bring up his personal beliefs) that much, he shows us different perspectives to look at religion.

Boy, 15, Catholic RE.

I think she (RE teacher) looks at everything in this scientific way, and she thinks that everybody is allowed to believe in whatever they want to believe in. At the same she looks at these religious stories like with a margin of error that something might have been forgotten or remembered in a wrong way, because it's all written up by people.

Boy, 16, Lutheran RE.

Overall, the greatest variations between students' views on RE or Ethics as school subjects concerned the way they saw these subjects: some considered them very interesting and important, others dull, useless, or even repeating the same contents from year to year. The connections between a teacher's worldview and the level of confessionality and the students' description of the contents was in some cases dependent on the students themselves and their personal worldviews:

Well, Ethics has always been one of my favorite subjects, basically. I like when they listen to your opinions and there are like never wrong answers, but you learn to argue.

Girl, 15, Ethics.

It's all interesting (learning about the prophets, angels and sins). Sometimes it is just a bit boring considering that I've been studying these same things for nine years now. It's like there's never anything new, just the same things again and again.

Girl, 15, Islamic RE.

With regard to worldviews as an explicit content, the main differences between the different RE and Ethics instructions were how other cultures and worldviews had been discussed according to the students. In Ethics and Lutheran RE, all the interviewed students mentioned other cultures, religions and/or non-religious worldviews and ethics being talked about, but in minority RE only in Orthodox RE and Krishna Consciousness RE were they systematically discussed:

This was nice (visiting the Lutheran, Catholic and Orthodox churches in Helsinki), I'd never been to them before. The Helsinki Lutheran Cathedral is like a Finnish landmark. ... We didn't get in the synagogue because of some security thing. ... that's why we compared different religions and visited them ... so that if something has been said in a RE class and if you misunderstood it, like there's only one God, or whatever, then you don't keep having this wrong impression and you don't end up racist but instead everybody becomes tolerant.

Boy, 15, Krishna Consciousness.

Last year we had all these other religions, for example Lutheranism, Judaism, Buddhism, Shintoism and we had a project on them and finally an exam on our own religion.

Boy, 16, Orthodox RE.

Lack of teaching about other religions was most evident in Islamic RE: when other religions were mentioned in this data, they were only compared to Islam. Some students also

thought it would be both interesting and important to learn about other cultures and religions. Lack of textbooks in Islamic RE was also mentioned:

Sometimes we talk about Christianity, but not like really. ... Like that Jesus is our prophet and then these things like our God has created the world and nobody else's God.

Girl, 15, Islamic RE.

I would invest much more on the Islamic RE teaching, like on books and all. And it should be talked about more broadly, not the same things all over again. Actually, I didn't learn anything new, just the same things every year.

Girl, 15, Islamic RE.

4.2 Three accounts on the role of RE or Ethics in the development worldview: The cases of Islamic RE, Lutheran RE and Ethics

4.2.1 A student from Islamic RE

The case of an Islamic RE student provides an example of how RE has according to the student *strengthened an existing worldview* in a *positive way* (Table 1). This student was a 15-year-old boy who had studied Islamic RE throughout the comprehensive school, for nine years altogether. He had been born and lived all his life in Finland but was of Bosnian ancestry. He described his family as religious: "it is our whole life, it affects everything, everyday life." His family followed the doctrines of Islam by not eating pork or consuming alcohol, but they did not pray together as a family on a daily basis, except when they went to the mosque together for Eid-celebrations. The boy prayed "sometimes" and identified himself as a devout Muslim: "I love Allah, he's in my heart." He went to mosque but did not attend Quran School because he did not know Arabic.

With regard to *the level of confessionality* (Table 2), the student perceived Islamic RE to be very supportive of his own and his family's religious worldviews. He also stated that participating in Islamic RE supported his identity as a Sunni Muslim. He described how all of his RE teachers had been practicing Sunni Muslims and he stated quite strong opinions about Shia Muslims being wrong, for example, about what is declared *haram* and what is not. He also mentioned that Sufi Muslims had "weird rituals". It was not clear how many of these views were the result of Islamic RE teaching at school, though. However, he thought that Muslims who had different interpretations of Islam should not participate in the same RE classes. When asked whether his teacher thought the same way, he referred to *the teacher's worldview* (Table 2) as a reason and answered "Yes, he is a Sunni."

The way Muslims are presented in the media notably concerned the student. He said that talking about terrorism and Islam together results in an utter misunderstanding of Islam and he wanted to point out that "the killing of the innocent is no part of Islam." He also said that he had encountered some racism due to his ethnic background and blamed that on the prejudice caused mainly by the media. When asked what could be done to change matters, he came up with a spontaneous suggestion for a new school subject, namely "some other class where we would talk about the history of religions and about religions as such." This new subject would not replace Islamic RE but would add to it and it would be for all students regardless of their own worldview. Issues about other religions, racism and

prejudice had not been discussed in Islamic RE so this would have been a welcome addition for the student himself as well.

Overall, this student very clearly identified himself as a Sunni Muslim and felt that participation in Islamic RE was part of his identification as a Muslim, thus strengthening his worldview. “Yeah, I love them”, he said when asked if the interviewer understood rightly that he liked Islamic RE classes. He also wanted to thank his RE teachers for the “great job” they were doing. According to the student *the contents of instruction* (Table 2) were seen to be very important and interesting.

4.2.2 A student from Lutheran RE

The case of a Lutheran RE student describes how it is possible that *RE strengthens an existing worldview* (Table 2) in quite a conflicting way. At the same time she described herself as an atheist and as a Christian. By atheism, she meant mostly lack of belief in the supernatural. Being a Christian meant more of a cultural thing, being part of a “Lutheran” or “Christian” ethos that, to her, was manifested mostly in her personal ethics and morality, which she saw as representing Christianity. “Lutheran” in her talk could be interpreted as being a part of the Finnish way of life.

This student was a 15-year-old girl who had studied Lutheran RE during her nine years of schooling. She told about her mother, who had resigned from the Finnish Lutheran Church because of the dispute about permitting female ministry in the 1980s, and about her father, who was “a little bit more religious” and “doesn’t like it when we make jokes about Jesus”. Her own worldview she described as follows: “In principle, I’m an atheist but I’m not against religions. I believe in evolution and the big bang and so forth but I respect the fact that people can believe in whatever they want to.” At the same time she called herself “a Lutheran” and “a Christian” and referred to “us” when talking about Christians in general. She was considering about eventually leaving the church: “why should I pay (the church tax) for the right to hold that title (of being a Christian).”

She stated that Lutheran RE may have contributed to her worldview somehow because she had studied “Christian RE” for nine years: “Since I’ve studied RE for nine years and eight of those only Christianity and only for one year those other cultures, it’s bound to affect my behavior in ways I’m probably not even aware of.” With regard to the category concerning *the contents of instruction* (Table 2), in her experience studying ethics as a part of Lutheran RE had been especially interesting and rewarding. Then again, she thought that discussions on different perspectives on ethical matters had mainly added to her previous thoughts about being open-minded and having a broad view on diversities in all aspects of life. She also reflected that some aspects of her own morality and ethical perspectives were part of being “Christian” in a cultural or a secular sense: “but the Christian in me means that after my Confirmation my godfather won’t be buying me a necklace with a cross but a goat in Africa.” She mentioned the Golden Rule as a valid guiding principle in life, no matter who had first come up with it: “a pope or a bum”, if the first source of a wisdom like that is religious, “they ought to get the credit for it.”

This student considered that the model of Finnish worldview education was good in that there were no religion-based private schools “like in central Europe.” Concerning *the level of confessionality* (Table 2) and *the teacher’s worldview* (Table 2) she made some critical remarks on the very religious RE teachers who she had encountered and whose instruction she had experienced as confessional, particularly in primary school. Her current RE teacher “seemed” to be religious but her teaching was considered “neutral” by the student.

However, she said that the teacher had given several clues about her own “conservative” Christian worldview but this did not affect the teaching or result in it being devotional or confessional.

4.2.3 A student from Ethics

A 15-year-old boy had studied Lutheran RE for the first four years of school and had then shifted to Ethics for reasons unknown to himself. His family had no religious affiliation or membership in any religious community. His perceptions about the contribution of Ethics instruction to his worldview formation were somewhat skeptical, and stated that *Ethics did not relate or contribute* (Table 1) to his worldview. The student reflected on his own worldview, saying that he did not “really have any.” By this he meant that he was not sure about anything yet, except that he knew he did not believe in “anything supernatural” nor would he be interested in any religious way of looking at life or the world.

When reflecting on the little relevance of *the contents of instruction* (Table 2) on the development of his worldview, he said that many of the topics discussed in Ethics class were “boring, everything about every religion, I’m just not that interested in that.” He also thought that there was no need for religions in general in Finnish society anymore even though he acknowledged that “we (Finns) wouldn’t be anything like what we are today if it weren’t for Christianity, it does influence us a lot.” When asked about the impact of Ethics on students and the elements of their worldview, he felt that the Internet had more influence on students’ thinking than Ethics could ever have.

When asked about his Ethics *teacher’s worldview* (Table 2), he said he had not really reflected on that before and did not have any comment to make. His notably indifferent attitude towards Ethics also seemed to affect his views on teachers. Later on in the interview he talked about racism and prejudice and admitted that they had talked about such issues in the Ethics class and he complimented the teacher for “giving room for discussions of all kinds.” He also perceived Ethics as “a place for discussions about moral issues, death and such things, if those issues were to be talked about at school.” These remarks can be related to the category *level of confessionality* (Table 2) in a sense of being not viewed as “ideologically” different from other subjects. The *level of confessionality* in instruction was not really an issue brought up by the student, only perhaps implicitly in terms of Ethics sharing the same ideological basis as other school subjects.

The student was very critical about Ethics as a subject. Not only did he view Ethics as virtually a “useless” school subject, he stated that he “wouldn’t attend (Ethics) if it “weren’t compulsory.” His views on the effect of public education was not as negative, as he argued that school in general had a significance in teaching students to become more open to the world and to fight against discrimination and prejudice in society.

5 Concluding remarks

In conclusion the majority of the interviewed 9th grade students articulated some contribution of RE or Ethics in the formation of their worldview. This showed in the way the students described the contents of the instruction and their perceptions of their teachers’ approach to the subjects. Some students found the teaching to be supportive of their existing worldview, others found that the teaching lead them to think ‘otherwise’, or even contradictory and opposite to what the teacher was bringing forth or instructing according

to subject content knowledge (see Tables 1 and 2). The influence of a teacher's role was apparent when talking about the teacher's own articulated worldview or worldview interpreted by the student. However, the results show that both RE and Ethics in the Finnish educational context are very much dependent on the teacher. This has been reported also in previous studies (see e.g. Kallioniemi 2000; Tirri 1996).

Teacher's self-reflection has been seen as an essential part of teacher's general professionalism for decades (e.g. Uusikylä and Athonen 2005; Dewey et al. 1933/1996). Despite of this teacher's self-reflexivity worldviews in particular require perhaps more focus than before in increasingly plural schools (see Poulter 2013; Rissanen 2019; Rissanen et al. 2019). More emphasis on worldviews in teacher's professional self-reflection in teacher education could help solve some of the issues raised also in this data concerning teacher's own worldview and its effects on the students' perceptions on worldview education. In education in diverse societies, it is increasingly important to be able see worldviews as fluid and flexible, evolving and dynamic not as a rigid, un-changeable installation of interpretations of the world, and personal thoughts and actions accordingly (see e.g. Droogers 2014; Aerts et al 2007). Ideally a teacher with 'worldview-mindedness' (Kavonius and Ikonen, 2019, manuscript) is both capable of reflecting his or her own personal worldview and to teach so that the teacher's own worldview does not harm or restrict the student's worldview-related reflections like in some of the cases in the data of this study they did.

According to Miedema (2014), the education of the personhood in worldview education is supported by the encouragement of the 'critical evaluative attitude' among the students. The findings in this study that report confessionality in instruction that some of the students had witnessed particularly in minority RE, is not in accordance with the current Finnish national core curriculum for basic education (NCCBE2014) but consistent with previous studies (e.g. Kimanen 2016; Zilliacus 2014). In future studies it should be examined whether in the long run the diversion from the aims of religious education towards a more confessional instruction has in contrary to the intentions actually negative affect on the relationship to religion among minority religion students as they gain more skills in evaluating not just the truthfulness of the knowledge received but also the justification the instruction they have received in public education.

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